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The Path to Purity

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The Path to Purity

“Impermanent are all conditioned things.”
When this one perceives with wisdom clear,
Disgusted, one turns away from ill.
This is indeed the Path to purity.

“Full of ill are all conditioned things.”
When this one perceives with wisdom clear,
Disgusted, one turns away from ill.
This is indeed the Path to purity.

“Lacking any substance are all events.”
When this one perceives with wisdom clear,
Disgusted, one turns away from ill.
This is indeed the Path to purity.



Out of infinite compassion for gods and men who are being tossed in the sea of *saṃsāra*, the Buddhas or the Awakened Ones appear at appropriate times in our human history, to declare the Truth which helps disentangle this tangle of life. The first such Truth is that the world and everything else therein is impermanent and therefore subject to the law of change. The change occurs with such great rapidity

and so unobtrusively, that the mind cannot sense it, being caught up in a net of illusions it has woven for itself for purposes of security. The duration of life, though it may appear to be a continuing phenomenon, in reality lasts only one thought moment. It may be compared to a river which maintains one constant form, one seeming identity, though not a single drop remains today of all the volume that composed the river yesterday.

The second Truth is that which changes is in a state of disintegration, agitation, commotion and restlessness and therefore unsatisfactory. Anything that has come into being inescapably has to go through the changes of disease, old age and decay and ends in death. Incidentally, disease is not the cause of death but birth certainly is the primary cause of old age and death.

The third Truth is that whatever goes through a process of change is change itself and there is no individual or self. You do not possess life but life possesses you, and you are therefore choicelessly subject to its vicissitudes and its vagaries. Not having control over life, "I" and "me" and the belief in an enduring soul becomes a fallacy. An intellectual understanding that all events, material or mental, are of time and therefore have the inherent nature of change, unsatisfactoriness and egolessness, helps calm

the raging storm within us.

When the mind discovers for itself these three Truths, it gets its freedom, and “I” which operated within a circumscribed area sustained by greed, hatred and ignorance, enters upon a frontierless space of *mettā* or universal love. Such a mind operates on frequencies of love and sustains everything living. It is hypersensitive to the misery of others and reaches out to alleviate suffering with thoughts of *karuṇā* or compassion. Being unpossessive, it rejoices in the happiness of others with thoughts of *mudita* or sympathetic joy. With nothing to lose or gain and without a measure of judgment, only thoughts of *upekkhā* or equanimity prevail. *Mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* are the four *brahma vihāras* or states of noble living. Brahma, the god of gods, who is himself subject to change, scours the world in search of those who practise them and keeps watch over them.

A mind has a choice of following either of two paths, one of ignorance that leads to death and the other of wisdom that leads to freedom. An unfragmented mind free from illusions and delusions and abiding in *mettā*, *karuṇā*, *muditā* and *upekkhā* will follow the Noble Eightfold Path of *sammā diṭṭhi* (Right Understanding), *sammā saṅkappa* (Right Thoughts), *sammā vācā* (Right Speech), *sammā kammanta* (Right Action), *sammā ājīva* (Right Livelihood), *sammā vāyāma*

(Right Effort), *sammā sati* (Right Mindfulness), and *sammā samādhi* (Right Concentration).

Those who walk along this Path will discover for themselves that they have broken the prisons of deceit they built for themselves, deliverance to obtain.

Your Mental Abode

“Rouse thyself by thyself.
Examine thyself by thyself.
Thus self-protected and attentive,
Wilt thou live happily.”

We look upon floods as a devastating force and victims caught up in them hold on to their dear lives precariously till the fury has abated. Those who are foresighted build for themselves homesteads above flood-level, while those who are indifferent either succumb to its perils or survive after much travail and hardship. Likewise the mind is assailed by floods of *kāma*(sensual lusts), *bhava*(becoming, arising from love of life), *micchā d iṭṭhi* (false views and theories), and *avijjā*(ignorance, i.e. not understanding sorrow and the escape from it), thereby obscuring its clarity of perception, its serenity, its beauty and happiness.

Under such stress the mind loses its freedom and in its bid to find anchorage and security for its deep-rooted desires and visions, invents and seeks protection in doctrinal theories, traditions, authority, fanciful images and the make-believe that induce illusions and delusions. The world is what is brought together by causes and effects. In seeking a purpose beyond ourselves, like chasing rainbows, we become dull, stupid and insensitive. All we need to do to overcome tensions and untie knots of our making is to bring about a transformation from within, go deep down and understand each problem, for the solution lies within the problem and not outside it.

“The currents in the world that flow,
Are stemmed by means of mindfulness,
Restraint of currents I proclaim,
By understanding, they are dammed.”

—Sutta Nipāta

In order to build a fortress for one’s mind, the four corner-stones are:

1. alertness, enthusiasm and zeal to rouse oneself and maintain an unflagging tenor of thinking;
2. earnestness stemming from the confidence in one’s own ability and skill;

3. restraint from actions that are harmful and injurious; and
4. control over the five sense faculties and the mind.

Sense faculties should work for our benefit and well-being, and like electric energy, await the harnessing of their resources. It is the mind that generates action and when the motivation is through intelligence, the result brings peace and happiness. When the motivation is through ignorance, bondage, woe and misery ensue as a necessary sequence. With an intellectual understanding that all created things must change, and what is subject to change is not satisfactory and what is unsatisfactory has no self, the mind steps into a new dimension where conflict ceases as there is no more accumulation.

Adverting to the mental dwelling built with much care, let us proceed to furnish it elegantly with the thought decor that makes for comfortable living. Hang the walls of your mental home with constructive images of the person you aspire to be. Keep your thoughts harmonious and complementary. Attitudes that conflict are like colours that clash. Their discordant effect makes you restless and irritable. The furniture you bring into your mental dwelling, its beliefs, the desires and aspirations should be in good taste. Your desires must be unselfish and a blessing

not only to you but to all concerned. Discard the mental furnishings of prejudice, criticism, hate and envy and choose instead the rich brocades of generosity, patience, service to others, optimism and love. As for the music, keep the fidelity high. Select an album of constructive mood music to brighten your day.

We come alone, we journey alone, and we leave alone. All that we are is the result of what we have thought. The edifice of our being is founded on our thoughts and is built upon our thoughts. Therefore, let us exercise the sovereignty of our minds and, discarding the fragments of ourselves, remain free to live whole and noble lives.

The Balance of Equity

Difficult it is to be born a human being and still more difficult it is to be born at a time when the Dhamma propounded by a Buddha could be experimented with. A Buddha arises not to speculate on a life after death or matters outside this world or alien to our lives, but to show the only positive way to consummate happiness here and now. Your mind is the only undisputed and cherished possession which

needs your sympathetic and kind attention and watching over. If neglected, it is like a metallic object which becomes rusty and corroded with disuse or it can be likened to a garden of flowers where weeds prevail and is no more fit for exhibition. When properly attended to, the mind's energy is conserved as though in a reservoir for the generation of power which illuminates. The only function of the mind, by its very nature and substance, is to comprehend all things with clarity, taking no impressions that lead to infatuations, dreams and intoxications, bringing about pain, contradictions, conflicts, upheavals, hatreds, illusions, delusions etc., the springs and sources of unhappiness.

Every word of the Dhamma has the flavour of emancipation. It is not to be enshrined in a book to be made sacred scriptures or to be moulded into a highly decorated image for the anointing with perfumes and taking out on auspicious occasions for ritualistic practices or labelled and put on the shelf for use in old age. The Dhamma has to be practised with every breath we take, with every morsel of food we consume, with every thought we think. All we need do is to act prudently and to constantly be in a state of awareness to sense whether we are doing the correct thing by ourselves, by others, both by ourselves and others. This constitutes the balance of equity which

has its own reward. What is good in the beginning is good in the middle and at the end, for that is the unalterable Law.

It is human nature to look for causes outside ourselves to bring us happiness, security, inspiration, motivation, etc. Therefore we take upon ourselves spouses, we invest in gadgets, we sign treaties to preserve the peace and prepare human charters to uphold the dignity of man. We have lost the music in our hearts and we go in search of the musician to teach us how to sing. On account of the utter bankruptcy of human goodness, the chaos in the world remains what it was at the very beginning. The freak nature of man resulting from pollutions that bring about a mental imbalance is manifest more than ever before. We are shedding our codes of modesty, decency, morality, honesty and integrity with the professionalism of a strip-tease artiste. Those whom we depend upon for our salvation or to bring about sanity are themselves dependent. There is no purpose in waiting for the water in the sea to evaporate if our intention is to catch a fish. The Buddha in his compassion and love for you and me and all living things has exhorted us to rely upon ourselves alone to work out our salvation with diligence. Buddhism is a doctrine of awakening, giving the highest place to discipline, concentration and wisdom, without which

we continue to remain in fetters and thralldom.

The Dhamma according to the Buddha could be easily seen; there is no time factor for seeing it; it invites investigation; it is comprehended by the wise each in his own mind. In explaining this he has stated that should a person be assailed with intense greed or hate, that person could see it clearly registered in his mind. Should that greed or hate leave him, he could easily perceive that too. There has been no involvement of time for either process. All that has been are mental formations with intellect as driving force. As for the investigation, it could only be done when the mind is concentrated and not fragmented. Concentration leads to intuition which helps discover the true nature of what is. In the case of the human being, the components are mind and matter which comprise the elements of extension, cohesion, heat, vibration and their four derivations, namely colour, odour, taste and nutritive essence. The body we so much adore and adorn not to reveal the ravages of time and disease is in fact a nest of worms, a tumour where nine holes abide and the filth trickling from every side pollutes the air with stench far and wide. Each person's *kamma* triggers off his life process and he could make for himself a bed of roses or a bed of thorns, with the mind as the programmer and initiator of action. All that we are is the result of what we have

thought; it is founded on our thoughts, it is made up of our thoughts. The planner is not external but internal.

Life is like the movement of a pendulum. The impetus of the last movement brings the time to the present moment and so on ad infinitum. In order to meet the present moment which is new, our minds must be free for a perfect synchronisation. This becomes possible when we have trained ourselves to think of things worth thinking about—those that elude tension, neurosis and paralysis. This kind of thinking constitutes noble living as followed by the Ariyas, the saints. It is then that one truly lives.

“Such is the Law which moves to righteousness, which none at last can turn aside or stay. The heart of it is love, the end of it is peace and consummation sweet. Obey!”

A Waste of Time

Is the world enduring or not?

Is there an end to the world or not?

Is life and soul the same or two different things?

Is there life after death?

These questions perplex human beings from the dawn of human intelligence to the end of time. Monk Māluṅkyaputta's confusion of mind became more confounded for the reason that the Buddha seldom or never alluded to such topics in his discourses. Having come to the conclusion that the Buddha's silence was a clear sign of his ignorance, the monk posed these questions and boldly demanded a clear statement as to whether he could or could not furnish answers, and in the event of his inability to do so he would leave the Order.

The Buddha questioned Māluṅkyaputta as to whether at the time of his ordination he had entered into a contract or obtained a promise that at a future date he would answer these questions. When Māluṅkyaputta answered in the negative, the Buddha told him that in the absence of such an agreement, the monk had no just cause to make a claim. Besides, should a person seek solutions to speculative questions such as these, he would not be able to clear his doubts in his lifetime.

The Buddha then set forth the example of a man injured by a poisoned arrow who, after a doctor has been summoned, questions the bystanders as to who shot the arrow, the direction, the description of the assailant, his caste and creed, the design of the bow, the kind of poison and so on, asserting that until and

unless these questions are satisfactorily answered, he would not allow the arrow to be extracted. Such stupid action on the part of the patient would allow the poison to spread throughout his system bringing about death, before he had done with his questioning.

The Buddha explained that he had fully expounded pain, its causes, release from pain and the means whereby release is obtained. Pain being the only reality, its elimination is life's first priority. Wasting time on speculative questions does not help improve discipline or increase wisdom, the two essential requirements for monkhood. Therefore, if the Buddha has not offered any explanations for certain problems or situations, it is best to leave them as they are.

At another time while journeying through a jungle with a retinue of monks, he plucked a fistful of leaves and asked the monks whether the leaves in his fist or the leaves in the forest were more in number. Their answer naturally being that the leaves in the jungle were numerically greater, he stated that what he had preached was a fraction of what he knew but that little is sufficient to accomplish life's purpose, which is to end suffering.

We are also reminded of the deathbed scene of the Buddha on this subject of questions. Moments before the Buddha passed away, Subhadda arrived there and

asked Ānanda for permission to seek a solution from the Buddha to a problem. Ānanda informed him that it was on inopportune moment as the Buddha was sinking. The Buddha having overheard this conversation asked that Subhadda be permitted to speak to him, as otherwise he would never have his question answered. Subhadda spoke to the Buddha and was so satisfied with the answer he received that he decided to enter the Order of Monks.

The Exalted One took up a pinch of dust on the tip of his nail and said “Even if this much *rūpa*(matter) be permanent, stable, eternal, by nature unchanging, standing fast, then the living of the holy life for the utter destruction of suffering would not be possible.”

The “I” of the Cyclone

“Matter and mind result in contact.
Yearnings breed the itch to have and hold;
without them there is no ‘mine.’
End ‘matter,’ contact ends.”

Have we taken life seriously or not? If we have, our motivation should be through a clear mind that generates actions beneficial for our well-being and that

of society. In such an event there is order out of which joy, happiness and freedom ensue. If we have not, a confused and troubled mind breeds disorder, leaving behind a trail of sorrow, despair and lamentation. A critical analysis of ourselves—we who form society—will prove beyond any doubt that we are no less hateful, arrogant and petty than before. No amount of blaming the spouse, the politician or the spiritual guru would do to help us clear up this mess, when there is hope for man in man.

Many things in this world are a torment and we give up because we do not have the capacity and the mental make-up to meet the challenge. We therefore become impatient, do wicked things, rant and rave, make invidious distinctions and behave in a puerile manner. We have seldom or never taken stock of ourselves to determine whether our lines of thinking are correct, or whether a radical change is the demand of the moment. If out of 50 years 49 have been lived with the remorse of shattered dreams, the licking of wounds and the strain of sustaining a mock show to the world at large, it is time we changed the content of thought before we run out of the oil in our lamps. Life is all that we know and it should be our constant endeavour and diligence to know its implications fully and completely. With the calming of the sense faculties, there is less friction over the inconsistencies

of the outside world that go to make life burdensome and a travail.

The Buddha gave Bāhiya Dārucīriya, who was as confused as you and I, the following advice which is a perfect exercise in the taming and training of the mind:

“When one sees, it is mere seeing, a choiceless observation.

When one hears, it is mere sound.

When one smells, tastes and feels, it is mere cognition.

When one senses, it is mere sensing.”

—Udāna

Matters such as evaluation, putting into containers labelled good or bad, gripping as though there is substance, keeping watch and ward, no more become necessary as sensations are neither real nor have lasting power. Mindfulness brings about mental tranquillity and physical well-being. For instance, when you respond with neutral feelings to a tirade of abuse as mere sound, no impression is registered. There is no involvement to stoke the fire of passions. It may seem hard at the beginning, as all such things are, but it is worth trying. Each one must reform himself to experience love, compassion, sympathetic joy and

equanimity so necessary to maintain a proper balance.

We cling to the belief that there is a self and all our actions, day and night, are to keep and preserve it in comfort and good spirits. The self is so hyper-sensitive that it will neither brook a hurt nor countenance any slight to its self-esteem or reputation. But contrary to its expectations and much to its consternation, the hair has turned to silver and the eyes grown dim with the passage of time. Should there be a self, it should have the ability and complete control to stall the onset of old age, decay and death which are the processes in the flux of time—the *saṃsāra*. Self, however, is not discoverable in the component parts of the body or in the bundle of sensations. Self is then a myth, a fallacy and a mirage, and when love of life has ended, there is a cessation of self and eternity or Nibbāna becomes a reality.

Table of Contents

Title page	2
The Path to Purity	3
Your Mental Abode	6
The Balance of Equity	9
A Waste of Time	13
The "I" of the Cyclone	16